

EVENING GROSBEEKS IN NEW BRUNSWICK - CHAPTER VI.

By Mr. & Mrs. G. Hapgood Parks

As we add this new "chapter" to the continuing story of our study of Evening Grosbeaks in New Brunswick, we assume the reader is familiar with the preceding chapters. They can be found in EBBA News 29(4); 30(1); 31(1); 32(1) and 33(1).

It was about midday on June 15, 1970 when we crossed the Canadian border at St. Croix and entered the province of New Brunswick. Although the afternoon was brilliantly bright and uncomfortably hot a flock of 10 males with 4 females among them greeted us as we reached the cabin which had already served as our headquarters at Astle during the five previous visits. One of the males wore a band.

Mrs. Stanley Stewart, our hostess, reported that a few grosbeaks had been around since mid-May, but only recently had they begun to come out of the forests in significant numbers. She told us, also, that the neighborhood had been "thoroughly sprayed" during the previous week. Almost total absence of mosquitoes and black flies bore comforting witness to one effect of the spraying, but we found numerous spruce budworm larvae hung suspended from the tips of the twigs.

Our bands (73-106501 to 73-107000 inclusive) had arrived at the Munn residence and soon we had our nets installed at the same locations as on our previous visits. While we were installing the poles, the junior author noticed a female Cowbird in the short grass. The bird seemed very weak and her behavior suggested probable influence of poison. Later in the afternoon, Mrs. Munn picked up a dead female cowbird, a victim of a "thoroughly sprayed" area.

Evening brought our first record. Two neighbourhood schoolboys, Larry and Danny Dobson brought in a motor vehicle casualty: an Evening Grosbeak with band number 59-118112. The next morning, up bright and early we set up our two 5 meter EBBA nets and four 3-celled potter traps. We soon banded a bird and placed him into one of the trap compartments to attract other birds. Before we realized it, we were in business.

Until Thursday, June 18th, when the weather turned on us, business was good and every day brought about the same amount of birds with a majority of males. Dawn found the sky thickly overcast and a raw, blustery southwest wind thrashed our nets as we started the new day at the Munn driveway. We had captured less than a dozen grosbeaks when, at about 0700, EBBA member Vernon C. Rossman of Ridley Park, Pa., dropped by.

As if to collect toll for the perfect June days we had recently, the weatherman sent blustery wind and a saturating fog to darken the dawn on Friday, June 19 and erase every chance that our netting could be continued. A flock of 33 males settled in the driveway. When they took off, the birds seemed confused by the fog. A few individuals peeled off into the forest behind our cabin, the main body flew away together, first southerly, then almost due westward out of sight.

An occurrence during late afternoon afforded us an exceptional opportunity to observe the potent magnetic power of the caged decoys. At the time the only grosbeaks in evidence were the three male decoys which were moving about uneasily, but quietly in the potter traps. Then the undulating course of an approaching speck in the distant southeastern sky identified it as a probable grosbeak. Although no other flying bird was discernible we became aware within seconds that the so rapidly approaching bird was uttering a shrill conversational "chirp" which characterizes the Evening Grosbeak in flight. The chance direction of the bird's flight path would bring it almost precisely over our caged decoys but they could not be easily seen.

Suddenly her forward motion became downward at 150 feet as she dove toward the decoys which must have just become visible to her. Her dive became a graceful, swift glide only inches above the cage of decoys toward a low branch of a white pine sapling in the hedge. She had seen our decoys but not our nets. She now wears band No. 73-106889.

Dawn and sunrise on Saturday, June 20, were hidden behind a dense blanket of fog. Although sizeable flocks (almost exclusively males) were moving by, the weather made accurate counts impossible. And so, we had experienced once again, the deep satisfaction of having exhausted our bands.

Tables I and II, which follow, will serve as a review and summary of the banding results we have just attempted to describe.

TABLE I. Evening Grosbeaks banded at Astle, N.B., 1970.

Date	Sex		Daily	Returns	Foreign	Repeats
June	M	F	Total		Retraps	
16	107	13	120	-	1	-
17	109	15	124	-	1	3
18	97	5	102	-	1	1
19	57	6	63	-	2	1
20	80	6	86	-	2	-
Totals	450	45	495*	0	7	5

* plus 5 Pine Grosbeaks

TABLE II. Foreign Retraps captured at Astle, N.B.

Band No.	Age	Sex	Netted & Released (1970)	This bird was banded:		
				By:	At:	Date:
57-174705	AHY	F	June 16	S.T. Harty	Mt. Holly, N.J.	Apr 13, 69
61-165629	ASY	M	June 19	A. McAlister	Canaan, N.H.	Feb 16, 65
69-154219	ASY	F	June 19	M. Chipman	Wautoma, Wis.	Jan 18, 66
72-154990	ASY	M	June 18	V.M. Freer	Ellenville, N.Y.	Nov 29, 68
73-112746	ASY	M	June 20	E.P. Teulings	Chapel Hill NC	Dec 3, 68
74-145323	AHY	M	June 20	W.E. Lanyon	Dix Hills, N.Y.	Jan 1, 70
74-153836	ASY	M	June 17	P.G. Lewis	Rumford, Me.	May 15, 69

Discussion

Sex Ratio. For the sixth successive year we have found male Evening Grosbeaks far exceeding females numerically in the flocks which have come under our observation. Our banding totals give additional evidence of male predominance. This year's sex ratio is so close to our average for the entire six-year period that a summary is indicated:

TABLE III. SEX RATIO AMONG EVENING GROSBEEKS BANDED AT ASTLE, N.B.

Year	Males	Females	Male %	Female %
1965	208	64	76.5-	23.5+
1966	478	22	95.6	4.4
1967	189	23	89.2-	10.8+
1968	221	16	93.3-	6.7+
1969	470	27	94.6-	5.4+
1970	450	45	90.9+	9.1-

Six-year
summary 2016 197 91.1- 8.9+

It is of interest that our current (1970) banding reveals a sex ratio of essentially 91% males and 9% females while the entire body of 2213 Evening Grosbeaks which we have banded during six years at this same geographical location has been made up of substantially the ratio of 91 males to every 9 females. Although the similarity of these two ratios must be accepted as coincidental the consistency of the numerical relationship between the sexes remains significant.

Migratory Movement. A very distinct movement from east to west was evident throughout our brief study this spring just as it had been more or less apparent upon the occasion of each of our previous visits.

Regarding the Spruce Budworm. Frequent spruce budworm larvae in varying degrees of mutilation were found draped over mesh filaments every day our nets were in use. These larvae had been disgorged by Evening Grosbeaks during their brief confinement in our nets. It was not uncommon, to see crushed budworm larvae in the mouths or dangling from the bills of the birds we were processing. Thus, we found a great deal of evidence that these birds are significantly worthy as predators of this destructive pest of the pulp wood forests. (This being the case, one wonders with anxiety what effect the budworm spraying has upon the birds which feed on these pests. Ed.)

Highway Mortality. The number of crushed Evening Grosbeaks along Highway #8 has already shown itself to be a tragically reliable barometer of the density of this species' presence in this part of the province. Unless he remains particularly alert, however, one loses an accurate concept of the total grosbeak population. The flocks which we actually see and count are numerically inconsequential since the vastness of the surrounding wilderness permits it to swallow up proportionate numbers of this vagrant species until the total census becomes tremendous almost beyond comprehension or belief. Remembering, too, the thousands which are banded at "southern" feeding stations during winter flights, the insignificant total of recoveries and retraps taken here can only help to magnify even further our estimate of the number of these birds which are distributed over Canada's far-flung pulp forests during the nesting and migration periods.

On Monday, June 22, we looked in on the mortality situation on Highway 8 between Upper Blackville and Astle. On this 45 miles of highway we found the remains of 80 Evening Grosbeaks (74 males, 6 females). Only one of them wore a band. This band (76-112317) was removed from the leg of a male found among 14 other male and 4 female bodies on the wide gravel driveway before a general market near Blissfield. The market proprietor, Fulton E. Greene, who said he had reported "several" similar bands during previous years, asked us to report this one. From the Banding Laboratory, we learned that the bird was banded at Richmond, Virginia by EBBA member Frederic R. Scott on April 18, 1970.

While we were discussing the unpleasant picture which the shattered bodies made in his driveway, Mr. Greene remarked that a raven nested in the vicinity of the highway for the past ten years. Every morning he comes around and cleans up this mess. He carries the dead birds away to his nest.

The only auto casualty we were able to identify wore the band 59-118112

This was the bird Danny Dobson had brought us on the evening of our arrival. This bird had been banded on May 7, 1966 at Worcester, Mass., by Philip B. Heywood.

An "International Flightway" is indicated. In Chapter V, we reported "reciprocal" recoveries involving Evening Grosbeaks banded by ourselves at Astle, N.B., in Canada and by V.E. Unger at Federalsburg, Maryland in the U.S.A. We suggested that these records "hint at a significant pattern of flight" by a species which is characteristically vagrant.

Permit us to strengthen this hint a bit by bringing back Fred Scott's 76-112317. This bird banded on April 18, 1970 was found two months later on June 22, 1970 dead on the highway near Blissfield, N.B. Likewise in 1966, Fred Scott placed a band (69-169228) on another male Evening Grosbeak in Richmond, Va. This bird was found on June 18, 1966, after a lapse of 4 months dead near Boiestown, N.B.

About netting of Evening Grosbeaks. Anyone who contemplates to use nets to capture Evening Grosbeaks should be aware of, and be prepared to react to the almost insane manner in which these birds fly to the aid of struggling members of their species. This powerful instinct presents a serious hazard to the bander. The netter's best control is to restrict himself to the use of the irreducible practical minimum of active surface area indicated by the bird population in evidence.

Procedures which could result in record totals at our mass-production stations during migration could only result in blood baths if applied to the netting of this species. Never have we used more than two 5 meter nets, end to end. Always have we remained alert to reduce this small net area even to the extent of furling both nets when a sudden influx of birds threatened to overload our nets. This has been our procedure and we have great satisfaction in the accomplishment that we have not had any net-casualties among the bird banded.

The netting of Evening Grosbeaks is NOT "play", but, with proper foresight and constant control the mist net is a highly efficient device for capturing this species (this can be said for all species and it is not implied here that netting or the use of nets is "play" for any other species. Using nets is always serious business. Improperly set nets or unsupervised nets always result in hazards to the birds. Editor)

We find ourselves unable to name any other common bird, the netting of which requires as intense supervision as the Evening Grosbeak does.

In appreciation and finale. So many good people helped us so much in the success of this 1970 study of Evening Grosbeaks in central New Brunswick! Lest someone be unintentionally omitted from any list of names we might assemble let us thank every one of you earnestly and heartily for your contributions of time and effort and for your cooperation on behalf of our project. Each of you has been a strong link in the chain of events which produced the part of our story that has become Chapter VI. Thank you, each of you, so very much.

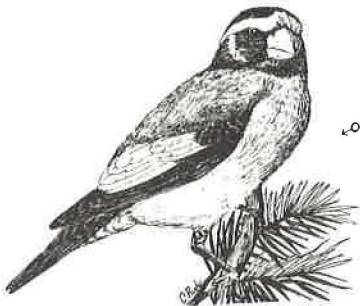
Although we are presently hoping to look further into the situation of the Evening Grosbeaks in New Brunswick, permit us, please, to terminate our story at this point. Our heart-felt thanks go out to all those readers who have expressed interest in the experiences we have described in the previous chapters.

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EBBA thanks Mr. and Mrs. Parks for bring us six years of enthusiasm and a great amount of useable data derived from their work in New Brunswick. We reluctantly added the last paragraph to the story, above, because we are hoping there will be a Chapter VII. Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Parks.

The Editor.

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C o r r i g e n d u m

In EBBA NEWS 33(3): 138, we reported that House Finch 75-07477 trapped by Mr. G. Hapgood Parks on 9 March 1970 at Hartford, Conn., was banded by Mr. Richard Cohen at Atlantic Beach, N.Y., on July 15, 1969. This date should have read July 15, 1968, we are now informed by Mr. Parks. Ed.